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THE LOST BOYS:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE MALE GENDER GAP AND ITS CAUSES

ARTIFACT PAPER

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts in Teaching

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CAPSTONE ARTIFACT PAPER

This project sought to answer the question *does a gender gap exist between male and female students, and what can be done to close it?* Having attempted to answer that question, the project's goal was to use a three episode podcast series comprised of anecdotal discussions with three other teachers from a variety of backgrounds to discuss how those teachers see (or don't see) the gender gap appearing in their classrooms.

The male gender gap refers to an observed phenomenon in which male students experience lower levels of academic success across a variety of metrics. Those struggles are displayed through academic benchmarks like college application and admittance (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006), grade point average (GPA) (Morris, 2008), disciplinary interventions (U.S. Department of Education, 2013), rigor of selected courses (Advanced Placement Program Enrollment, 2016), and scholastic engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Creating a podcast series was a decision that arose from a desire to draw upon the experience of real teachers while also reaching a large audience. Initially, professional development trainings were considered, but were ultimately discarded as project possibilities due to the likelihood of reaching only a small audience (the audience to which the professional development training is delivered). Using a podcast as a medium for distributing information offered several benefits. Availability is valuable - the listener can engage with the material on their own time table. Additionally, the listener can easily review material from the podcast without interrupting the flow of a large group training. Further, the audience for podcasting is potentially unlimited - if the content was informative and valuable, it could reach a much larger audience than a training, and for a longer period of time.

As a medium, podcasting has been found to be an effective learning tool for a variety of ages (Chester, Buntine, Hammond & Atkinson, 2011; Killingback, Ahmed & Williams, 2019; Marrocco, Wallace Kazer & Neal-Boylan, 2014; and Jiménez-Castillo, Sánchez-Fernández & Marín-Carrillo, 2017). With those data, podcasting was selected as an appropriate tool for conveying the information.

That audience can be very broad. In most simple terms, the goal of the project is to increase awareness in the education community for the purpose of decreasing this supposed gender gap. With that as a motivator, any member of the education community who is interested in receiving information through a podcast is an intended audience member. Educators with experiences overlapping the author's experiences may find more value in the Capstone Project Paper, but care was taken in selecting the three other teachers such that any listener may find information relevant to their own experiences.

Those teachers are all from the same Midwestern American state. Robby is a high school English teacher who teaches rurally. His high school combines high and middle schools due to the size of the district, but they function as separate schools. He has been teaching for seven years.

Randy teaches in an urban school district with a large immigrant population. He is a middle school biology teacher, having taught both seventh and eighth grade. He has been teaching for five years.

Karen is a retired teacher who finished her career in 2016. Before her retirement, she spent most of her years as a special education teacher in elementary classrooms. However, she

also taught in high schools and in college classrooms. She taught for over thirty years in a variety of locations and settings, but taught in a rural suburban elementary for the majority of her career.

This project is best explained through reverse engineering. The end result was a three part series of podcasts, ranging in length from twenty to twenty three minutes. Each of those three episodes were based around a discussion theme (external social factors that influence this gender gap such as peer relationships, internal factors that influence the male gender gap like total amount of study time, and consequences of the gender gap - such as higher rates of dropping out of school) with contribution from each of the three different teachers. Between speakers, the podcast host (this paper's author) would narratively link the audio clips together.

To gather the audio for those episodes, each of the teachers individually recorded their responses to the following questions:

- One U.S. Department of Education study has shown that boys were more likely to drop out of school than girls. Is that something you observed in your school?
- In what ways do male and female students behave differently in your classroom?
- Do you feel there is a biological difference between male and female students, or do you think differences in their behavior is socialized?
- A 2006 study by Duckworth and Seligman found that girls tended to start their homework earlier in the day, and also spend more time overall on their homework. How would you describe the differences in male and female study habits, as you have seen them?
- Ablard and Lipshultz (1998) found that girls tended to be better than boys at school-related tasks like overcoming distractions and staying organized. Is that something you have ever seen?

- Klevan, Weinberg, and Middleton (2015) found that girls oriented social relationships around academics (meaning, were more likely to talk about academics with their friends) than boys.
 - Have you seen that?
 - Why do you think that might be?
 - Do you think there are benefits to having academic-oriented relationships?
- Martino (1999) found that boys preferred to appear as if their academic successes were effortless, or that they did not try in school in order to be successful. Have you seen examples of students behaving that way?
- Morris (2008) found that boys were more likely to be perceived as feminine if they were high achievers in a case study of a rural high school. Have you ever observed male students who other students perceived as less masculine because of how they approached their learning?
- What advice would you have for educators striving to close the gender gap? For a teacher who wants to help close this gender gap, what advice would you give?

These teachers were not recorded at the same time or place, so once the responses were given, those responses were then reorganized to fit a narrative flow. This was accomplished by transcribing the audio into text format and highlighting relevant portions based on how the responses fit into the themes of the episodes. Not all audio from the teachers was used. For full clarity in what those teachers said and to ensure that words were not taken out of context, interested readers can visit this project's website (found at dswart01.wixsite.com/thelostboys) available on the tab titled "Contributors and Transcripts."

The text from the transcripts was taken and reorganized into an episode script (these are also available dswart01.wixsite.com/thelostboys). Between most of the audio clips, a narrative voice over is scripted to segue one clip into the next. In not all cases was this done - a small number of the audio clips flowed from each other naturally, and in those cases, no narrative transition was used. These transcripts are reproduced on the project website, on the “Contributors and Transcripts” tab.

The recordings were created using Audacity, a free open-source recording software. In one instance, Audacity was used to record one side of the audio from a Skype call due to Robby not being able to be recorded in person.

Following compilation of the episodes, completed audio was uploaded as a .WAV file to SoundCloud.com at a profile I created for this project. That profile can be found at soundcloud.com/derek-swart-864830529 or by visiting the project’s website.

Finally, the project’s website is found at dswart01.wixsite.com/thelostboys. Available on the website are the transcripts included with this artifact paper (both original and compiled transcripts), embedded audio from the SoundCloud profile, brief biographies for the contributing teachers, and a rationale or explanation of the project for new listeners. Upon the capstone papers inclusion at Bush Memorial Library, a link to the permanent address of that document will also be included.

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